

THE
Death of the Righteous:

A SERMON,

PREACHED IN THE
CANADA PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH,

Lagauchetiere Street, Jan. 12th, 1862,

BY THE
REV. WILLIAM TAYLOR, D.D.
(PASTOR.)

PUBLISHED BY REQUEST.

MONTREAL:
PRINTED BY JOHN C. BECKET, 38 GREAT ST. JAMES STREET.

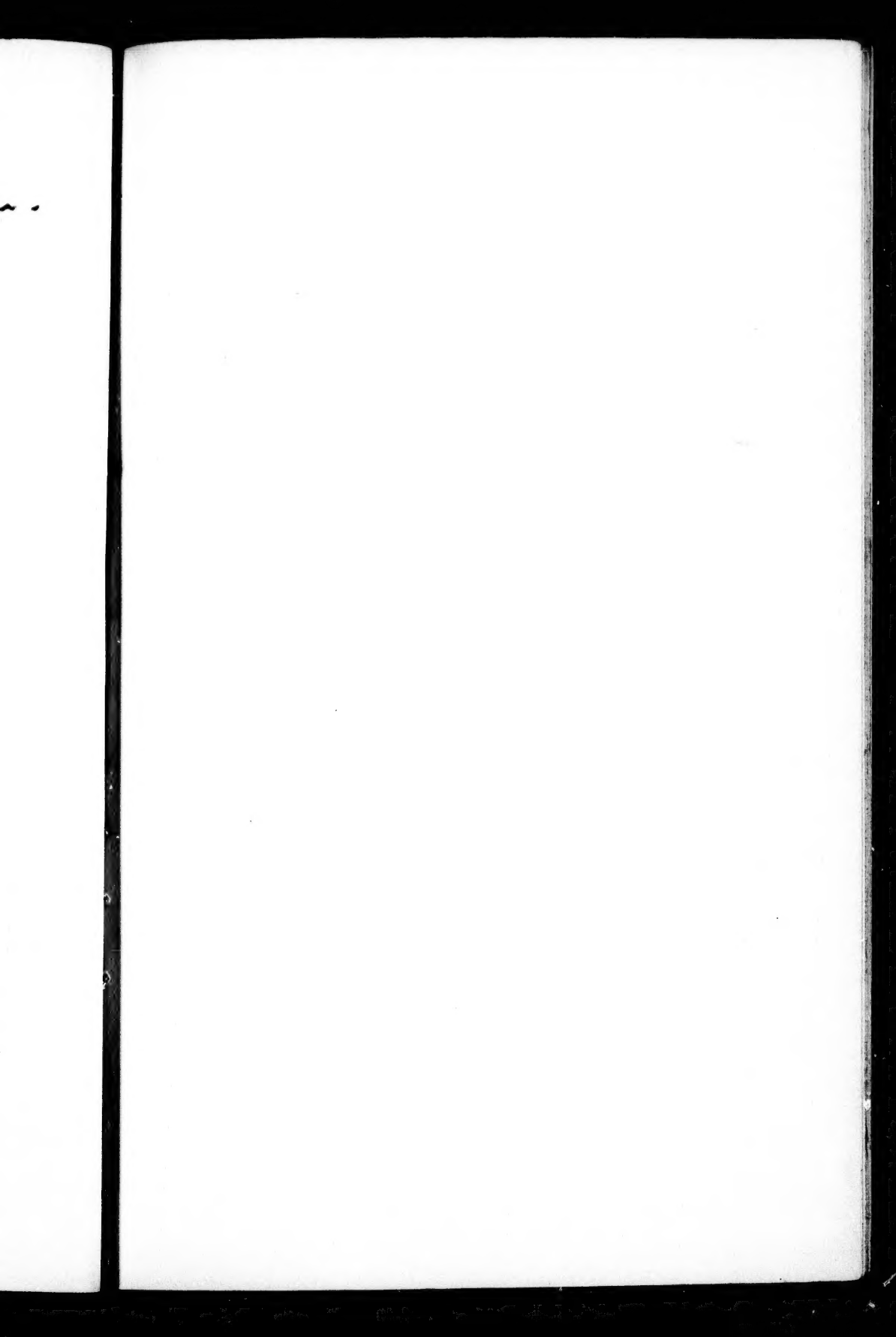
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Psalm 37. 37. Mark the perfect man, and behold the upright, for the end of that man is peace.

I shall not consider these words at this time as a text, but rather as a topic. The topic which they present, the death of the righteous, is one which possesses peculiar interest at all times, and which events, that have been lately taking place around us, invest at this day with peculiar claims. The affliction that has befallen our beloved Sovereign, the Queen, has plunged the whole of her subjects into sorrow; and many of the families connected with this Congregation, have, within a late period, been visited with bereavements that more nearly affect ourselves. At such a time the voice of Divine Providence seems to be calling on us to prepare for our latter end; and, as a means of instructing us how to do so, let us consider the peace and hope of the righteous in his death.

Nothing can be of greater importance to mortal man, than his state at death. We know that we must die; and that every day, as it passes over us, brings us so much nearer that eventful hour, so much dreaded by one class of mankind, and desired by another, when we shall yield up our spirits into the hands of Him that gave them. With this knowledge before us, it might be expected that every man would consider it a business of the first concern, to be prepared for death; and that no one would allow

any other matter to intervene, or withdraw his attention, till he is certain that he has got possession of a hope, that will carry him safely through the last, decisive conflict. But, alas, how generally is this expectation disappointed! The mass of mankind seem to live as if they were never to die; or as if death were one of the most unimportant events that can befall them.

And yet we think it scarcely possible for any man, possessing intelligence and the power of thought, to be really happy, until he feels certain that he has made provision for the great change which death will soon make in his condition. We read in ancient history, of a tyrant who awoke one morning, and found a sword suspended over him, by a single hair, from the roof of his chamber. Such a situation was fitted to teach him a lesson, but we may well conclude that he found it so alarming that he lost no time in escaping from it. Yet the situation of every mortal man is somewhat similar, having the sentence of death suspended over him; while, perhaps, there may be something more fragile than a hair, between him and the execution of it.

And while no man can taste a purer or more rational joy, than the man who carries in his bosom a clear, and well-founded hope of immortality, so no man gives such evidence of true greatness. The man, I say, who journeys through life, conscious that he is prepared for his dying hour, has a principle within him which ennobles his character. Especially when he draws near to the end of his course; when he goes down to the valley of the shadow of death, and tranquilly resigns himself to die, in the sure and certain hope of a blessed immortality; he exhibits a greatness of soul, a magnanimity of spirit, which raises him far above mortals of the ordinary class, and allies him with those kindred spirits, whose society he goes to join in the heavenly world. What an impressive scene is that, which the inspired Apostle presents to our mind, when, speaking of himself as if he had already arrived at the farthest boundary of human life, and had but one step more to take to reach eternity, he stops, as it were, to look back on the way he had come, and says, "I have fought a good fight; I have finished my course; I have kept the faith:"

and then, looking forward to the glory he was about to enter, he adds, "Henceforth there is laid up for me a crown of righteousness, which the Lord, the righteous judge, shall give to me on that day!" That is greatness indeed. Such a person raises our poor fallen nature to a dignity that pours contempt on all worldly grandeur. "Mark the perfect man, and behold the upright, for the end of that man is peace."

There are some who receive, with suspicion, the descriptions, which they sometimes read or hear, of the happy death of Christian believers. They will sometimes ascribe them to the partiality of affection; or stigmatise them as exaggerated pictures of the imagination; or, at the farthest, will maintain, that, if such triumphant death-beds have ever been witnessed, they must be confined to the times of inspiration; and are to be found only in the history of those extraordinary men, whose supernatural endowments gave a supernatural tone to their character, and to their whole lives. But the prejudice of such men arises from a limited and imperfect knowledge of Christian society; their situation in life perhaps, giving them no opportunity of becoming acquainted with facts, and of seeing with their own eyes, how the Christian faith can support a dying believer's hope. Such happy death-beds are not unfrequent in the Church of Christ, even in the days in which we live; and, if the time could ever arrive in which they would entirely disappear, the statement of the Psalmist in the text would cease to be true.

But, blessed be God, there is such a thing to be witnessed still, as a dying bed rendered happy, by the faith and hope of the gospel. And it has been our privilege to witness not a few of these, within the limits of our own Congregation, within a recent period. Some of these have been so instructive and impressive, that, I think, I only discharge a duty to you, by presenting a brief account of them to this audience, in the hope that it may lead some to resolve, that they shall immediately prepare to meet death, as a Christian believer alone can meet it.

Not long ago, I was called to visit a young woman, a member of the church, in her last sickness. Perceiving that her case

was a very critical one, I spoke to her as a dying person ; and while receiving from her the most unqualified acknowledgment of her unworthiness as a sinner, she professed, at the same time, to rely, with perfect confidence, on her Saviour, Jesus Christ.—In his “precious blood,” she found firm footing for her hope. She had no fear to die, for she was persuaded that Christ was both able and willing to save her ; and in him she could place an humble, yet unwavering trust. In this happy persuasion she continued till she breathed her last.

A second young person, whom I visited in similar circumstances, expressed the same faith and hope, though with somewhat greater timidity and reserve. Yet she was not afraid to die ; and, when I questioned her as to the ground of her hope, I found that her eye also was directed to the same quarter, and her soul clinging to the same refuge,—“the precious blood of Christ, which cleanseth from all sin.” Herself, a sinner, ready to perish, she trusted in Him who died to save the lost.

A third young person who has been lately taken from among us, suffered a long and lingering illness, and died with still greater comfort, or, I may say, with more evident triumph. Naturally of an active and vigorous mind, he was able to form a very clear conception of the Gospel-plan of salvation ; and he not only embraced it, as one that was worthy of God, but expressed to me his admiration of it ; because it made such a wonderful provision for condemning and punishing sin, while it saved the transgressor by a free pardon. For some time, he did not realise such a clear and unclouded hope as might have been expected, though he could always look to the cross of Christ with a calm, sustaining confidence. As his end drew near, however, his doubts were completely scattered, and he died rejoicing. “Oh, I could leap,” he said, “into the bosom of Christ. I have seen Christ in three different persons, (aspects,) and though it was, as through a glass, darkly, yet, in all, he seemed a perfect Saviour to me. Oh, I think, I have the boldness of Paul, and, if I were in the pulpit, I would preach Christ ;” at the same time, raising his arms, he said aloud, “Awake to righteousness,

and sin not." So far from having any fear of death, on the contrary, when told by his physician, that his time on earth might be counted by hours, instead of days, he said "I am glad of it; I am glad of it; come, Lord Jesus, come quickly." When near his end he said: "How delightful would it be to go home on a New Year's eve, and spend my New Year in that world, while you are spending it here. I have always been a lover of pure water, and I will get it pure there." In this happy state of mind he continued till he gently fell asleep.

I make mention of another, who has been taken from us in the 'mid-time of her days.' She had long been agitated with much anxiety, and had suffered much distress, about the state of her soul, and seemed to belong to that class of persons whom Bunyan has described in the 'Pilgrim's Progress,' under the character of Mr. Fearing. The disease, of which she died, soon affected the state of her mind, and almost cut off all possibility of holding any communication with her. Among the last questions I put to her were these; I asked her if she was still able to look to Christ, and to find him an all-sufficient Saviour, and refuge for her soul? To which she answered, "I desire to do so." I asked her again, If she could look to him as the Lamb of God, and trust in his precious blood, as the only ground of her hope of pardon? She again replied, "I desire to do so, I have no other hope." Immediately after this, her mind wandered; and I could no longer get her to understand what was said; but from what I have known, in past years, of the spiritual exercises of her soul, and her earnestness in seeking the Saviour, I have no doubt that 'the root of the matter was found in her,' and that she has risen now above all those doubts and fears that so often depressed her here.

I make mention finally, of the death of an aged person, who has been lately removed from us. He was one of patriarchal age and character; like Obadiah he had "feared the Lord from his youth," and he followed him to the end. His experience was large and varied. In the course of his long life, many changes went over him; and, indeed, his history would furnish materi-

als for a more extended narrative than I can possibly give at this time. In his youth he was apprenticed to a trade in one of the towns in the north of Scotland. "Some of my apprentice companions," he writes in his diary, "were profligate and immoral, and presented such examples of depravity as I had never seen before. But fortunately for me, there were others of an opposite character. These were decidedly pious, and, though belonging to different communions, they stood firmly by one another as brothers. Two of them were church-members; and, besides taking part in conducting a Sabbath-school, they met once a-week, along with some others, in the evening, for mutual prayer. To these meetings they invited me. They had a number of religious books at their command, and they freely offered me the use of them: of which I gladly availed myself. They also invited me to attend their several places of worship on the Sabbath evening; and of this I also availed myself; but I attended the Parish Church in the forenoon, in which I paid for a sitting.* At the age of 19, after much serious reflection, I resolved to devote myself to the Lord; and accordingly, I applied to my minister, and was admitted to the Communion of the Church, in the summer of 1809."

The above account of his conversion was written in his old age, and, in commenting upon it, he adds: "At this distance of time, I have no distinct recollection of the influences which wrought on me, to lead me to take such a decided step, at so early a period of my life. But I think that the bent given to my mind in the Sabbath-school, which, (then a novel institution in the north of Scotland, had been established in his native parish, by some members of an Antiburgher Church) and the fortunate circumstance of my being brought afterwards into the society of religious persons, were mainly instrumental in leading me to do so. Nor must I forget to mention the early and careful training that my mother gave me; a part of which was making me commit to memory Psalms, and hymns, and portions of

* His mother was a worthy and devoted member of the Established Church, and he afterwards says, that respect for her memory, led him to prefer the Communion of that Church.

Scripture, most of which I remember to this day. The first Psalm was a special favourite with my mother, and the whole family were required to learn it with great care; because it was penned by David, under Divine inspiration, for the express purpose of guarding the young against the contagion of evil example. Our attention was also particularly directed to the 23 and 121 Psalms, which describe the care that God takes of his own children, and teach the duty and privilege of placing ourselves continually in his hands, for guidance and protection."

Such was his introduction to the Christian church, and such the influences which wrought in his conversion. And you will particularly observe the place which is here assigned to the Sabbath School, and to the pious care of a God-fearing mother. Time forbids me to follow his history farther, and speak of the dealings of God with him, after he emigrated to this side of the Atlantic.* I shall only observe that he lived to old age, in beautiful consistency with the public profession which he made in his youth. He was for many years an Elder in the church, and filled that office with credit to himself, and benefit to others. He was the first to open a Sabbath School in the part of the country where he resided, and was Superintendent of it for many years. He was also one of the first to open Branches of the Bible and Tract Societies,—he was a warm advocate, and liberal supporter of Christian Missions; in short, wherever the honour, or cause of Christ was concerned, he was ready to give his word, his money, his personal labour, and the moral weight of his character, to the interests of his kingdom.

On the anniversary of his birthday, in 1859, he thus writes: "This is my seventieth birthday, and I have now, by God's goodness, arrived at the age mentioned by the Psalmist: 'The days of our years are three-score years and ten.' It becomes me to humble myself before the Most High God, and examine the way he has led me hitherto, in his gracious Providence. And here, at the very outset, his more common, and daily, and hourly mercies, call for my grateful acknowledgment. And when I

* See Appendix.

think of the many instances in which he has interposed his Almighty arm to save me from bodily harm, and from moral defilement, with what feelings of deep abasement and thankfulness should I appear before him! My time here must now be short; oh, that I may be enabled to be watchful and resigned to the will of God; and to look constantly to Him, through his Divine Son, for preparation for that inevitable change which I must soon undergo!"

On the last return of his birthday, 1861, he writes as follows: "I am reminded that this is my seventy-second birthday. How great has been the loving kindness of the Lord to me, to spare me to see such an advanced age, in such vigorous health. The close of my life must, however, be near at hand; and it becomes my imperative duty to be ready to obey the call of my Redeemer. I am also reminded, that on the 8th day of this month, fifty years ago, I left home for America. What a multitude of mercies my heavenly Father has bestowed on me, during that long period! "Surely goodness and mercy have followed me all the days of my life, and I shall dwell in the house of the Lord for ever."

A few weeks ago, his health and strength began to fail, but the hope with which he could look to Christ, was as clear and as strong as ever. He felt that he must leave this world; but he could look forward with *much hope*, as he said to me emphatically, to the future. And that hope rested on the one foundation, "Christ, and him crucified,"—a Saviour presently received and realized, in the exercise of an humble faith. His end was peace. He died rather by the exhaustion of the vital powers of nature, than by any form of disease. With the calm composure of a child, he fell asleep, without a struggle and without a fear; resigning his spirit into the hands of God, whom he had served from his youth!

But it is now time to inquire what lessons do these facts present to us? We reply, many; and all of them, weighty and impressive. To some of these let me now direct attention:

(1.) It is worthy of observation that all these persons belonged to the Communion of this Church. I do not mention this in a spirit of boasting, but for the purpose of noticing an objection, which is sometimes brought against narratives of this kind, viz : that they relate to persons, or times, so remote, as to render it impossible for us to subject them to the test of personal examination. Now, all these persons belonged to this Congregation; they went out and in amongst yourselves. It was here they met the summons of death; and it was here they were prepared for it. The three first in particular, were brought up in this Congregation from their infancy; they were trained in the Sabbath School and Bible Class; and had no other means of salvation than such as you enjoy every Lord's Day. And the fact, that these means were sufficient for their salvation, will leave you without excuse, if you continue strangers to the grace of God. They found Christ here, in his word and ordinances; they found sufficient encouragement to come to Christ; sufficient light to guide their footsteps to heaven. And, if you fail to do so, the blame must be your own.

I feel that Christ has conferred an honour upon this Church, as well as on the families concerned, in the peace and joy granted to these persons in their dying hour; but I feel that he has also been reminding us of the solemn responsibility which is connected with the place we occupy here, and the privileges we enjoy. For the faith of these departed friends seems to throw back a sentence of condemnation against every one who remains unconverted, amid the light and grace which meet us in the Sabbath-school, and in the ordinances administered amongst us. Are there any amongst us, who shall be separated from their society in the future world? Are these words, which Christ used respecting another matter, applicable to this congregation, "*one shall be taken and another left?*" It would be a terrible surprise to the rich man in the parable, to behold Lazarus in Abraham's bosom, while he himself was plunged into the horrors of perdition. It would be a terrible aggravation of his misery, to see that poor man raised so high in glory, whom he had long treated with pity and contempt; because it would remind him

that he might have been saved also;—he had the same means and opportunities of being saved that Lazarus had, if he had been equally wise to improve them. I warn and entreat you to take care, that this may not be the case with any of you, in relation to those whose death we now bewail.

(2.) The example of all these persons teaches us that the only hope, which will be found of any value in the hour of death, is that which rests exclusively upon Christ. None of these persons could trust in their own goodness, or prayers, or repentance, or religious life. They all felt themselves shut up to an exclusive dependence on the blood of Christ, as alone sufficient, and sufficient in itself, for their salvation. All of them entered the eternal world, confessing that they were sinners; and all trusting in Him, who came to save sinners, even the chief. All of them entered the eternal world,—entered Heaven, shall I say,—with the same sentiment upon their minds, which is so beautifully expressed in these lines:—

No other argument I bring;
I urge no other plea;
But 'tis enough, the Saviour died,
The Saviour died for me.

And from their example we may all learn what it is to “believe in Christ to the saving of the soul.”

(3.) The death of these persons, of whom we have been speaking, is a warning to the *young* of this congregation to prepare for their latter end. Three of them were young. Now, I see many before me who are of the same age, and not a few who were their acquaintances and friends. To all such a loud warning is given in their early decease. It admonishes you of the folly of looking upon your youth as a security from death; or supposing that because you are young in years, you are far from the grave. This year you may die, or this week, nay, this night ‘thy soul may be required of thee.’ The question of your life or death may be trembling in the balance, and, before many days shall have passed over your heads, the awful decision may be given. Of this much however, we are certain, that you *must* die;—that the series of

second causes, which are destined to bring you to the dust of death, are already in operation ; and, if, when they shall have worked out their appointed issue, you are found impenitent and unconverted, you cannot be saved. Now, then, is the time to set yourself in order ; in this day of mercy, and of gracious visitation. Begin now the work of your salvation ; prosecute it with the earnestness which the momentous interests at stake demand ; and never relax your efforts till you find yourself in possession of a hope, which will enable you to meet death without fear. " Be followers of them, who, through faith and patience, are now inheriting the promises."—Amen.



APPENDIX.

This excellent person has left some writings behind him, from which we append the following extracts. He has the following reflections on his joining the communion of the Church in his youth :—

“To some, it may appear rash and presumptuous, to associate thus early with the company of believers; but I am of a very different opinion; and am persuaded that no greater evil can befall a church, than to permit her young people to postpone, from year to year, their making a public profession of the Faith, till they become so immersed in the ways of the world, that they lose all relish for religion, or the society of religious persons. Such persons, when they get married, will probably apply to the church for *privileges*; not to themselves, (for they are quite ready to admit that they are unworthy of them,) but for baptism to their children! And sorry am I, that they but too readily obtain their wishes! I regret exceedingly that such a practice should ever have been tolerated in the church; I believe it to be unscriptural; and a most ensnaring thing for unreflecting men. In my own case, I can conscientiously say, that my early connexion with the Church has been blessed to me in a variety of ways. In the first place, I feel assured that it has been instrumental in keeping me from many temptations to sin; into which, but for the check of my being a Christian professor, I would certainly have been carried headlong. In the second place, I have found that when beset with commercial difficulties, exposed to sudden and extreme personal dangers, or visited with personal or family affliction, on humbling myself before God, praying to him for direction, and firmly relying on his promises, he has never forsaken me; but, on the contrary, has vouchsafed such protection and guidance, as enabled me to surmount all my

difficulties, escape all my dangers, and to say, "Whom the Lord loveth, he chasteneth, and scourgeth every son whom he receiveth." I would, therefore, recommend all young people to give themselves early, even earlier than I did, to the Lord."

In the following extract he expresses his feelings on being elected to the Office of Elder in the Congregation with which he was connected. This took place in 1815, when he was only 26 years of age. Three others were chosen along with him. He says: "I pleaded hard to be excused, at least at that time, on account of my youth and inexperience; but, after much debate, the Congregation adhered to their choice. It may well be conceived that this event proved a subject of deep and serious reflection to me, as well as of earnest prayer for divine guidance. I felt an entire want of confidence in my qualifications for so important and solemn an office. All the other nominees, as well as those already in office, were old enough to be my fathers. The responsibility which lay upon me, whether I accepted or rejected, perplexed me very much; in fact, the reasons on both sides, seemed to hang, for some time, in even balance. Not knowing well to what side duty impelled, I prayed earnestly to God for direction; when the Lord himself seemed to lead me, by a way I knew not, to stand for the honour of his name; saying to me, "Fear not, my strength is perfect in weakness." Having devoted myself anew to my Heavenly Father, in prayer, and supplicated Him to lead me in the way he would have me to go, (to cast in my lot more unreservedly with the people of God than I had even yet done,) and to keep me from improper desires of the riches and honours of this world, I consented to be ordained an Elder. This office I continued to hold 41 years, that is, till 1856, when I resigned it, preparatory to my removing to Montreal. Here let me pause, and bless God for this further token of his loving kindness, in permitting me to exercise the office of a steward in His vineyard, here below; and in making that office instrumental in keeping me aloof from many of the fashionable sins and follies of the time, and place. All the others, who were ordained with me, have long since paid the debt of nature."

Attention is particularly called to the following extract. In previous portions of his journal he had given an account of "manifold trials," which he suffered, arising from commercial losses, and domestic bereavements, and in conclusion he says:—

"Here it may not be unprofitable, either to myself or the readers, to take a short retrospective view of what I have written, bearing, as my case does, such a close resemblance to that of the patriarch Job. Cast on my own resources at the early age of 22, in a land where everything was new and strange to me, with only a solitary guinea in my pocket; twelve years later, I was at the head of a business, second to none in —, Shipping yearly from 10 to 15 cargoes of Timber to Great Britain; 3 to 4 cargoes of Fish to the West Indies, and receiving in return as many cargoes of West India Produce;—Fitting several vessels to the Gulf and Labrador Fisheries; and building a vessel yearly for the British market; so that, had any person, at that time offered me £10,000 for my property and business, it is not at all likely I would have accepted it. Four years farther, I was reduced to the verge of bankruptcy! God saw meet, for my good, to strip me of all the substance he had bestowed on me. Not only so, but I was in debt also, to the extent of between £4000 and £5000, for which I had nothing to pay! True I had a good deal of real estate, but, at that time, it was unsaleable, at any price. What then was I to do, in these circumstances? Very many when so situated, lose their moral character, never to be retrieved, either by defrauding their creditors, or betaking themselves to dissipation, or both; and ultimately sink into an early, and dishonoured grave. It pleased God, in his great mercy, to order my lot otherwise. It was not the wish of my creditors to discourage me, by subjecting me to the painful alternative of bankruptcy, always distasteful to a true Scotchman. All they asked of me was my promissory note; to which I added mortgages of all my Real Estate, without reserve, as a security. But, in fact, that was no security at all, for, at that time, it would not have sold for half the sum it represented.

The year 1827, therefore, saw me commencing a new line

of business, beginning, in short, the world afresh ; with a small, helpless family to provide for, and about £200 a year of interest to pay, besides keeping up my credit with my new furnishers of stock. A part of my daily prayer then was, that God would so prosper me, as to permit me to live till I could pay off all my debts. To this end I now bent all my energies, by close application to business, and economy in every department ; and by this course, I began in 1836, to retire some of my mortgages, and continued, year after year to diminish them, till, in 1850 I paid off the last ; and in 1857 I was able to retire from business, with a comfortable provision for my old age.

This affords a remarkable example of what may be accomplished, under the blessing of God, by a steady adherence to habits of industry and perseverance, and a firm dependence on the Divine Providence. In fact, the result appears in my eyes, almost miraculous ; and had it depended on my own unsanctified efforts, I must have utterly failed. But as, in the workings of Providence, the means are never separated from the end, it pleased God, in the year 1827, to bring me into close intimacy with W—— M——, Esq., and to incline him to place unbounded confidence in my integrity. So that, whenever any of my creditors began to feel uneasy, and shew restiveness, pressing me at the same time for payment, I had recourse to my friend, who always lent me a helping hand ; and consequently became, in the end, my only creditor ; so that I may safely say, he was the means, under God, of bringing me through my difficulties ; for which I shall always bear his memory in grateful remembrance."

This extract presents a rare example of sterling integrity, noble independence, and indefatigable perseverance. Twenty four years labour ! to pay off a debt, which, in many cases, would have been extinguished with a stroke of the pen. Honour to the man who could enter on such a struggle ; and thanks to the Divine Hand that sustained him, and brought him triumphantly through.